

1 Timothy 4:1-16

Prayer – An outline for this class is provided at the end of this study.

READ All of 1 Tim. Chapter 4.

I. False Teachers/Source of Heresy (4:1-5)

- At the end of chapter three, the Apostle Paul tells Timothy that “the church of the living God” is “**a pillar and buttress (foundation) of the truth.**”
- He then follows that with what is likely a **familiar hymn from the early church—one focused on God’s truth in Jesus Christ.**
- **The hymn describes the incarnation (manifested in the flesh), the resurrection (vindicated by the Spirit), and the ascension into heaven, where Christ is seen by angels.**
- As we transition **into chapter four**, the apostle cautions Timothy that **the false teachers in Ephesus are rejecting the truth that the church upholds—the truth that was recently articulated in a hymn!**
- In the ESV translation, the **first word of verse 1 in chapter 4** is “**NOW.**” Other translations, like the CSB, use the word “**BUT.**”
- The commentator **Gordon Fee suggests** that a better translation for the **Greek conjunction (δὲ) at the beginning of the sentence** might be the word “**HOWEVER.**”
- Do you see the connection? At the end of chapter 3, the church expresses these profound truths about Christ through song. However, the Spirit, meaning the Holy Spirit, conveys that for some, it is merely words, as some will turn away from the faith.

In this section, the apostle seeks to help Timothy understand the nature and origins of false teaching and, despite his youth, acknowledge his role as a true teacher of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Throughout chapter four, we will frequently observe the contrast between these two groups of teachers who stand in opposition to one another.

a) Later-day Apostasy

At the beginning of chapter four, we learn that the “later times,” also known in the New Testament as the “last days,” will be marked by false teachings inspired by deceitful spirits and demons.

- This prophecy concerning false teachers should not surprise us. If we recall Paul’s words to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20, he likely spoke to them years before writing his first letter to Timothy.
- Acts 20:29,30 **“I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.”**

As Paul writes to Timothy, the Holy Spirit clearly states that this truth is occurring.

- The “**later times**” in the New Testament are **NOT** just future eschatological dates.
- After the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ, Scripture teaches us that we are now in the last days as we await the return of Christ.
- The Apostle Peter confirms this in his sermon on the day of Pentecost, quoting from the Old Testament prophet Joel. **“And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh.”**
- Of course, that is exactly what **happened on the day of Pentecost**.
- Also, the beginning of Hebrews. **“Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son.”** Hebrews 1:1,2
- The Holy Spirit says that in these last days, the church **should expect false teachers to arise. They must be dealt with!**
- The Lord Jesus taught in Matthew 24 that one of the **signs of the end times is the increase of false teachers**.
- Matthew 24:10,11 **“And at that time many will fall away, and they will betray one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will rise up and mislead many people.”**
- In Mark 13:22, Jesus warns us, **“For false Christs and false prophets will arise and perform signs and wonders, to lead astray, if possible, the elect. But be on guard; I have told you all things beforehand.”**

- The **end result of this false teaching** is that some within the church will always be deceived and **depart**, or “**fall away**,” from faith in Jesus Christ.
- The Greek word Paul uses for “**depart**” is the same word we use in English for the word “**Apostacy**.”
- It is the same word used by the epistle's writer to the Hebrews chapter 3:12: “**Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.**”

b) The nature of false teaching

- What is the **nature of this false teaching specifically at Ephesus** that Timothy must address?
- **First** of all, there was an **extreme form of asceticism** taught by false teachers.
- **What do we mean by asceticism?** If you were to look up the **definition**, as I did, you would find this:
- **Asceticism** is the practice of **strict self-denial** as a measure of personal and especially spiritual discipline: **rigorously avoiding self-indulgence**.
- In Ephesus, the **false teachers were forbidding marriage** and at the same time **promoting abstaining from certain foods**. (Roman Catholicism in 1960s)
- Marriage, food, **sex, and hunger** are two of the **most basic needs of the human body**.
- God created both of these for our benefit and declared them good! They are, in fact, “creation blessings” to mankind.
- As he did in chapter two regarding the role of women in the church, the **Apostle Paul once again reinforces his message by referring to God’s work in creation**.
- This is especially clear when we read in verse 4: “**Everything created by God is good.**”
- This should immediately remind us of the **repetition of the phrase** in Genesis chapter one: “**God saw that it was good.**”
- **Paul’s response to the false teaching is a corrected interpretation** of the Genesis account.

- So much of biblical error and false teaching stems from a **lack of understanding and faith in the creation account in Genesis 1 through 3!**
- Genesis, the first three chapters, is the **foundation of a Christian worldview.**
- Paul is saying if **everything created by God is declared good**, then **nothing created by God should be considered bad.**
- At Ephesus, it seems that the false teachers were advocating the notion that the path to holiness involves rejecting God's good gifts of sex and marriage, as well as certain foods.
- **In other words, humanity's inherent fallen instinct suggests that we need to take actions to be deemed acceptable by God. By refraining from sex and certain foods, I can attain acceptance.**
- Many bible **commentators mention** that in the early centuries of the church, a false teaching called **Gnosticism** was starting to gain popularity.
- **No one can say for sure if this particular heresy is what Paul had in mind** when writing to Timothy.
- One basic belief of Gnosticism—though this is an oversimplification—is that matter, including the human body, is evil. Therefore, the only path to Christian holiness involves subjecting the body to certain hardships!
- In addition, **Gnosticism placed knowledge above faith.** The word Gnosticism, in fact, **means “knowledge.”** Coming from the Greek (Gnosis).
- **Paul uses this word in the closing of his letter to Timothy, specifically in chapter six, verse 20: “O Timothy, guard the deposit entrusted to you. Avoid the irreverent babble and contradictions of what is falsely called “knowledge.”**
- Whoever these Gnostics were, they believed they possessed special knowledge that, according to the apostle, was nothing more than babble and falsehood knowledge!
- They placed their so-called knowledge above any real faith in Christ!
- We often observe this today in cults and various heresies! They all appear to possess some special knowledge about this or that. Something they either add on or completely misinterpret from God's Word.

- The **evil one, the devil, deceives and leads people away from Christ** by **mixing some truth with lies**. That is what was, no doubt, happening in Ephesus. As Paul calls it, it is the **“teaching of demons.”**

In many ways, this holds true today. Listen to William Hendriksen on this.

- “Though in its ancient forms Gnosticism has passed away, its spirit has been in evidence again and again throughout the centuries. Also in our own day, whenever the Old Testament is frowned upon, whenever human reason is exalted about Christian faith, whenever the thesis “Sin is real and is in essence rebellion against God” is rejected, or whenever man’s ability to save himself is proclaimed (which is a denial of Christ as the only and perfect Savior), **the ghost of Gnosticism stalks again.**

c) The origins of false teaching

- Turning now to the **origins of false teaching.**
- **How is it, or why is it, that so many people embrace false teaching?**
- There are many reasons, but at a minimum, the Apostle Paul **gives us three reasons to consider. 1) The Devil’s lies, 2) Seared conscience, 3) Doctrinal causes**
- Beginning with the devil’s lies, the Holy Spirit leaves no doubt as to where the origins of false teaching, like asceticism, originate.
- Asceticism, denying oneself of the good gifts God provided at creation, is demonic in origin.
- The Apostle Paul tells us that these false teachers at Ephesus were devoting themselves to **“deceitful spirits and teachings of demons.”**
- Someone might say, “Aren’t we supposed to deny ourselves?” What is so bad about self-denial, even abstaining from good things?
- We are **NOT, of course, talking about an occasional fast or an occasional pause from sex with your spouse.**
- **We are discussing someone who thinks that depriving himself of these gifts of creation will somehow render them more acceptable to God. These are the devil’s lies.**
- At the very beginning of humanity's creation, the devil deceived Eve to draw her away from the God who made her. The devil’s true aim is always to overthrow God and position himself in God’s place!

- This same demonic spirit, along with deceitful spirits and the teachings of demons, is actively trying to influence those who teach God's people. Sadly, this same evil spirit has succeeded, leading to the existence of many false teachers even today in our society generation.
- These false teachers are **“insincere liars, and their consciences are “seared.”** That is the **total opposite of the teaching that comes from the Holy Spirit.**
- **Remember Paul's aim, or goal, of his teaching** in chapter one verse 5.
- **“The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.”** That must be our goal for teaching also!
- We need to ask ourselves **what a “seared” conscience is.**
- The word in the Greek original language (**καυστηριάζω**) **is where we get the English word cauterize.**
- **It is occasionally used in medical practice. To cauterize a wound, extremely hot metal is applied to stop the bleeding. The wound is then closed tightly to prevent anything from getting in or out. it.**
- Paul compares this to a conscience that has become so seared that the truth of God's Word no longer affects a person's life. Their conscience has become insensitive and deadened!
- That is a terrifying place to be! By constantly arguing with one's conscience, resisting its warnings, refusing to repent, and persisting in a sin one knows is wrong, a person can reach a point in their mind where conscience no longer disturbs them about it sin.
- When **this happens, the evil one has succeeded in his wicked scheme!**
- So, one of the **origins of false teaching** comes from this person who no longer is led by the truth of the Word of God. **Paul calls them insincere, hypocritical liars!**
- May God **grant his grace** and keep us from ever having a seared conscience!
- These are **two sources of false teachings** we learn from this section. **The devil's lies and a hardened seared conscience!**

d) Guarding against false teaching

- The question for all Christians, and most especially those who desire to teach the Word of God, is **how do we guard against false teaching?**
- As always, we must learn the truth of God's Word and then seek to obey it! Paul says this at the end of verse 3: **"Believe and know the truth."**
- The apostle will write to Timothy at a later time, **in his second letter**, and tell him
- "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, **rightly handling the word of truth**" 2 Timothy 2:15
- One way to avoid false teaching is to **counter that by humbly studying the word of truth**. If you are a teacher, **you must rightly handle God's Word**.
- John Calvin writes, "So the true remedy for remaining obedient to God is to **concentrate on what is contained in His Word. We are to stand upon it, and those charged with preaching the gospel must diligently declare God's message to the faithful, namely that they should submit to our Lord Jesus Christ and not turn an inch aside, lest they depart from the path of salvation.**"
- You men who desire to be ministers of the Gospel, **you must be men of prayer and men who know the Word of God**.
- You must strive to maintain a good conscience!
- 1 Peter 3:15,16. **"In your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give a defense to everyone who asks you the reason for the hope that is in you. But respond with gentleness and respect, 16 keeping a clear conscience, so that those who slander you may be put to shame by your good behavior in Christ."**
- The Apostle writing to the church in Corinth said. **"For our proud confidence is this: the testimony of our conscience, that in holiness and godly sincerity, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially toward you."** Is this something we can say with a clear conscience?
- **If we reject a good conscience, we are on track to make a "shipwreck of our faith,"** as Paul taught in chapter one about Hymenaeus and Alexander. See 1 Tim 1:19

II. Sound Teaching and Godliness (4:6-10)

- In verse 6, and for the remainder of this chapter, the Apostle Paul turns his attention away from the negative description of the later times and toward Timothy as a man of God.
- A servant who teaches sound doctrine and is a model to others of what a healthy teacher looks like!
- Oftentimes, the best defense against error is a positive presentation of the truth.
- The apostle is now going to get very personal with Timothy. In verse 6, he starts this section by saying, “If you.”
- In the rest of Chapter 4, Paul shows us his deep love and concern for Timothy’s ministry and personal well-being.
- At the same time, as is typical of this letter, the false teachers are always on the apostle’s mind! Much of what he says to Timothy stands in contrast to the false teachers in Ephesus.
- Paul gives a number of commands and exhortations from which we learn what a “good servant” of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is.
- We know it does **not come easily**, for as he writes in verse 10, we must “toil and strive” toward it.
- What makes a “good servant” (v.6) of the Gospel of Jesus Christ? First, we are taught, is continuing in “good doctrine,” or continuing instruction in sound doctrine.
- A good minister of Christ continually instructs people in sound doctrine and trains himself in that same doctrine. The Greek verb tense indicates an ongoing, continuous process instruction.
- The idea is to raise and train children, nourish them with good food and sound instruction for years until they are adults, and prepare them to live in the world.
- The NIV translation reads, “If you point these things out to the brothers and sisters, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, nourished on the truths of the faith and of the good teaching that you have followed.
- So, a good servant of Christ **both teaches and receives** sound doctrine. That is the first necessity the apostle gives us.

- **Secondly**, a good minister of the Gospel of Jesus Christ must **be self-disciplined in doctrine and practice.**
- In verses 7 and 8, the “**imaging**” the apostle uses changes from the **nourishment of a child** (verse 6) to the **exercise routine of an athlete!**
- In verse 7, in the phrase “train yourself for godliness,” Paul uses the Greek verb γυμνάζω (*gymnast*). In verse 8 in the phrase “bodily training is of some value,” Paul uses the Greek noun γυμνασία, (*gymnasia*).
- In both cases, one does not need to know Greek to understand the meaning! The words **gymnastics and gymnasium** come from these words.
- When we think of a gymnasium, or gym for short, we can't help but think of hard, repetitive work!
- We can think of the athlete training for an upcoming Olympic competition, a concept popular in Greek and Roman culture. Or perhaps someone is working diligently to get in shape and lose weight.
- In either **case, you can expect hard work and sweat.** In fact, these are imperatives or commands! You must work hard to be a good minister who uses sound doctrine in your teaching. **The discipline of prayer and study is NOT easy!**

Yet this is what Paul is encouraging Timothy to emulate. Avoid foolish talk. Steer clear of irreverent language. Instead, be a faithful servant of Christ Jesus and **“train yourself for godliness!”** There is great benefit in godliness for both this life and eternity!

- The word "godliness" appears 15 times in the New Testament. It is interesting to note that 13 of these instances are found in the Pastoral Epistles! This speaks volumes about its significance for the minister of Christ!
- **We must avoid the spiritual junk food of the world, the flesh, and the devil have to offer!**
- Instead, **feast on the Word of the living God.** The words of the **faith and good doctrine** that you know and love!
- In verse 9, we encounter the third “**trustworthy saying**” in this letter. It is somewhat challenging to determine whether Paul is referring to what came before in verse 8 or what follows 10.

- Commentators appear to be divided on this issue. I find no reason why the reliable saying is unsuitable for both verses. Verses 8 and 10 align with the context of godliness, and both are trustworthy sayings.
- The question for exegesis, however, is the author's original intention. If pressed, I tend to agree with Gordon Fee, who believes that in verse 9, the **trustworthy saying** Paul refers to relates to the latter part of verse 8: "Godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for both the present life and the life to come."
- Paul concludes this paragraph with one of the most glorious statements of salvation found in the Word of God. Read verse 10. Jesus is the only Savior of all people! He is the one true and living God in whom believers place all their hope and trust Amen!

III. Timothy: Model of a Healthy Teacher (4:11-16)

- In our last section, we continue to focus on Timothy as a model teacher at Ephesus and for the church throughout the centuries.
- The apostle starts with **two imperatives**. Two commands. Timothy is to **command and teach "these things."**
- The verbs **command and teach** are present imperatives, indicating an **ongoing continuous** action!
- To paraphrase what Paul is saying, **"these things" that I have just written keep commanding and teaching others so that they also are **sound in doctrine** and **godly Christian living**.**
- The word "command" is a **strong word**! It carries authority. **In the era in which Paul was writing, it had military and judicial overtones.**
- Timothy must not only command with authority, but he also needs to be able to teach! He must direct the false teachers to cease their heretical lies and instead teach sound doctrine!
- **What is Paul to command and teach? "These things."**
- The term "**these things**," which is singular in Greek, is a favorite of the Apostle Paul. He uses it eight times in this letter alone!
- In chapter four, verses 6, 11, and 15, the phrase "these things" sums up the instructions and orders given to Timothy, which he was to continue passing on to others.

- He was to **represent the Apostle Paul and the apostolic teaching!** **How would you like that pressure?** He'd need to work with people of all ages and **speak and teach with love and authority!**
- Much has been written in books and commentaries about Timothy's age. While we don't know his exact age, it is widely believed that he was relatively young—many estimate he was between 30 and 35 years old. He was a young man with great responsibilities!
- Though young, **Timothy must set an example** for all others as part of his duties. An example of "love, faith, and purity."
- **There's no doubt that some in Ephesus, perhaps the false teachers, questioned why they should listen to such a young man. Paul understood this and reminded Timothy that "no one should despise him."** **καταφρονεῖτω**
- No one should "**look down upon,**" no one should "**scorn,**" no one should "**treat with contempt**" is the intended meaning.
- Remember, **this was a culture** in which elders (older people) were very respected. Timothy no doubt needed this encouragement!
- **If God has called you to preach and teach His holy Word, do not worry if people think you are too young. Your way of life, speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity are the examples the LORD will use to minister to those in need souls!**
- **Those who belong to Jesus Christ, His sheep, will hear the good shepherd's voice in preaching the Word of God. They will not care about the age of the preacher!**
- One of the **greatest preachers in the history of the Christian church**, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, **who was greatly used by the LORD, preached his first sermon at the age of 15 years old!**
- In verse 13, Paul **shifts from personal instructions to Timothy's duties in public ministry. In the interim, three duties** are assigned to Timothy before he can return to Ephesus.
- The **first** is that Timothy must devote himself to the **public reading of Scripture.**
- Undoubtedly, an **early church worship service** would have had aspects **similar to those of the Jews, who worshipped** in the synagogue.
- Ever since Moses, reading God's Holy Word **in a public setting** was an activity God required.

- **Listen to Deuteronomy 31:11-12: 11:**
When all Israel appears before the Lord your God in the place he chooses, **you must read this law before them within their hearing. 12 Gather the people—men, women, and children, as well as the resident foreigners in your villages**—so they may hear and thus learn about and fear the Lord your God and carefully obey all the words of this law.
- Quite naturally, the **church would have continued** this aspect of Worship.
- On Paul’s early missionary journeys, it was customary **to first go to the synagogue**. After the public reading of Scripture, the opportunity to preach the Gospel occurred.
- Luke tells us this in Acts 13:14-15: “on the Sabbath day they (that is Paul and Barnabas) went into the synagogue and sat down.¹⁵ **After reading the Law and the Prophets**, the synagogue rulers sent a message to them, saying, “Brothers, if you have any word of encouragement for the people, say it.”
- After the reading, Paul would preach salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ. The **cross of Christ and the resurrection were undoubtedly central to his message**.
- **Isn’t this the order we see here** in Paul’s commands to Timothy? **Scripture reading, exhortations (or preaching), and teaching!**
- We should see from this passage **that Scripture must be central to all our worship services**.
- Our English translation doesn’t show it, but in Greek, a definite article, **“the,” comes before each word**. In other words, **the Scripture reading, the exhortations, the teaching**.
- **This is significant because it shows that these were already recognized as parts of public worship** in the Christian church.
- Timothy was to do these duties in public worship because God had enabled him to do so! **God had provided the gift of teaching to Timothy**.
- Why did Paul need to remind Timothy of this gift from God?
- Given **his significant responsibilities**, it might have been a **great encouragement** for him to be reminded that **God supplied the necessary spiritual gifts to Timothy, which would have boosted his confidence!**

- Spiritual gifts from God **are always given to build** up others in Christ. They bless and benefit those who love the Lord and seek to keep His commandments.
- Timothy should **never become careless with his gifts or disregard** them. This principle applies to all believers in Christ, no matter their gifts. Use your gifts for the glory of God and the benefit of His church!
- **Continuously develop the abilities God has given you.** Everyone in the church will notice this and affirm your gifts. Since spiritual gifts are meant for the church's benefit, the church will validate those gifts.
- We should note the urgency in Paul's words at the end of chapter 4: Practice, immerse yourself, stay vigilant, and persist. These are imperatives that emphasize their importance!
- Paul is concerned for Timothy, knowing that Timothy, **like all of us**, is **NOT exempt from temptation and error!**
- Close with prayer.

I Timothy 4:1-16 Outline

I. False Teachers/Source of Heresy (4:1-5)

a) Later-day Apostasy

i. Later days

ii. The Spirit expressly says

b) The nature of the false teaching

i. Extreme asceticism

ii. Creation blessings

iii. Heresy

c) The origins false teaching

i. Devil's lies

- ii. Seared conscience

- d) Guarding against false teaching

- i. Study and obedience to the Word of God

- ii. Maintaining a clear conscience

II. Sound Teaching and Godliness (4:6-10)

- a) Sound doctrine/Good servant

- i. Instruction in sound doctrine

- ii. Self-discipline in doctrine and practice

- iii. Another “Trustworthy saying”

III. Timothy: Model of a healthy teacher (4:11-16)

- a) Dual imperatives/ “These things” – (v. 11)
- b) Duties as a minister of Christ Jesus (v. 12,13)
- c) Exercising his gift (v. 14)
- d) Being constant (v. 15-16)